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Remarks Prepared for Delivery
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I want to begin by thanking each of you for being with us today. You've taken time away from other demands, traveled great distances in many cases, to be here. We want you to know that we appreciate that. The knowledge and experience you offer, the creative thinking and collaborative spirit you bring to this forum will be invaluable to us.

There are several people who deserve special recognition. I want to thank our BLM State Director Bob Abbey and his staff for the support they've provided for this forum; and the Nevada Commission on Tourism, represented by Larry Friedman, for their generous hospitality and particularly sponsoring the lunches we'll enjoy, both today and tomorrow.

I also want to thank: David Brown of America Outdoors; Derrick Crandall of the American Recreation Coalition; and Jim Mosher of the Isaac Walton League, for their assistance in planning and organizing this forum.

We have a new Recreation and Visitor Services Advisory Team that has been chartered to make recommendations through our BLM Executive Leadership Team. The advisory team, led by Tim Smith, has done a great deal of work in advance, in contact with many of you, to ensure that we are well prepared for this forum and able to use our time well and wisely.

And finally, there are many individuals in the BLM recreation program who've worked hard to ensure that our efforts here are productive and successful. Time doesn't permit me to name them all, but I do want to acknowledge the good work of the BLM Recreation staff.

And finally, I want to extend a special welcome to Don Charpio, who was recently selected to lead our National Recreation Group in the Washington Office. Don comes to us from the BLM State Office in Arizona and brings extensive knowledge and experience in public lands recreation.

Introduction

I want to begin with a story that provides some perspective on the evolution of our recreation program in the BLM. The story goes back to 1967, and an incident involving a group of Girl Scouts who were on an overnight camping trip in the quiet, remote desert of Arizona.

The group was startled awake at dawn by the roar of a couple of motorcycles coming across the desert. The Scout Leader stopped one of the bikers and asked what he was doing there.

The man said, “If you think this is something, wait’ll this afternoon. We have a race coming through here.”

When the Scout leader asked who had authorized the motorcycle race, the biker said: “No one. These are Public Lands.”

The Girl Scout Leader complained about this in a newspaper column. The column found its way to the desk of Interior Secretary Stewart Udall. Secretary Udall sent the column down to the BLM Director, with a note that said: “Do something.”

When you’re the Director of the BLM, notes like that from the Secretary of the Interior do get your attention.

So the Bureau responded. In the succeeding 37 years, the BLM has done a lot. In partnership with people like you and the organizations you represent we have:

- Introduced tens of millions of Americans to their public lands.
- We’ve made it possible for them to experience the beauty and wonder of these magnificent landscapes.
- Those yearning for excitement, adventure and physical challenge have found it on the public lands.
- Those simply desiring to feel connected with our natural world, and find solitude and spiritual renewal, have found their place on the public lands as well.
- We’ve worked to ensure that visitors to the public lands – however they may define “recreation” – can enjoy it with as much freedom as possible, and enjoy it safely and responsibly.

We've made tremendous progress over the years. Recreation has emerged as one of our premier programs in the BLM. And it is a source of great pride for us.

Yet, today we still find ourselves searching for answers to many of the same questions that arose from that encounter nearly 40 years ago between the Girl Scouts and the off-road bikers.

- How do we meet the ever-growing public demand for quality recreational opportunities and experiences?
- How do we accommodate the great diversity of recreational interests, while minimizing conflicts among recreational users?
- And how do we integrate recreation into our multiple use mission?

How do we minimize conflicts among recreationists and those who use the public lands for other purposes that also serve the public interest – purposes that contribute to our quality of life in other important ways?

This administration, Secretary Gale Norton, our partners and stakeholders, and all the people we serve, are looking to the BLM to “do something” to find the answers.

We've invited you to this forum because we are determined to respond, and we need you. We need your individual views and concerns, and your creative ideas.

Our Goals for this Forum

Again this year we have identified recreation as one of our foremost priorities. We have established two specific short-term goals: first, developing a 5-year recreation Strategy; and second, convening this National Recreation Forum.

Our purpose here is two-fold: to listen to our constituents who are involved in public land recreation issues; and to continue our campaign for broad public participation and collaboration on recreation and visitor services.

Moving forward throughout this year and beyond, we are determined to make progress on these key objectives:

- Establish a comprehensive approach to travel planning and management;
- Manage public lands and waters for enhanced recreation experiences and quality of life;
- Enhance and expand visitor services, including interpretation, information and education;
- Ensure public health and safety, and improve the condition and accessibility of recreation sites and facilities;
- Provide fair value and return for recreation through fee collection and commercial services;
- Encourage and sustain collaborative partnerships, volunteers and citizen-centered public service; and,
- Encourage sustainable travel and tourism development with gateway communities and provide community-based conservation support for visitor services.

As you can see, we have an ambitious agenda. Obviously we could never hope to accomplish even a small part of that alone.

The progress we make will come through close collaboration and partnership with people like you and the organizations you represent.

When we look at some of the challenges we're facing, it is obvious that we need you more than ever before.

The Challenges

Foremost among these challenges are the population changes that are continuing throughout the West, and the impacts of these changes on the public lands. Nine of the 12 Western states with extensive BLM lands are the fastest growing in the US. Our greatest challenges are found where rapidly growing communities are closest to the public lands.

No agency is more closely connected with local communities than the BLM – with gateway communities like Durango, Moab, and Redding; with resorts such as Lake City, Vail, and Sun River; with metropolitan areas like Salt Lake City, Denver, and this city of Las Vegas.

More than 4 thousand communities – with a combined population of 22 million – are just a half hour drive from public lands.

More and more, businesses are relocating to both the urban and rural West. Communities are growing, and second homes are booming as Americans seek to enhance their quality of life.

Western states and local communities have a tremendous economic stake in recreation.

The recreation and tourism industry is one of the top three industries in every Western state. BLM-managed public lands directly account for billions of dollars in economic benefits related to recreation. Public land recreation supports tens of thousands of jobs and thousands of businesses.

Ray Rasker is an expert on the demographics of the West and we'll be hearing more from him about the implications of population growth and urbanization on public land recreation.

Another challenge we face is the growing demand for access, services, and facilities.

Twenty-five years ago we managed about 500 recreation sites. Today we manage more than 3,000. We issue more than 350,000 recreation use permits to groups and individuals each year. We issue 32,000 Special Use Permits for some unique kinds of activities that offer their own unique management challenges—things like the “Burning Man” event, dog sledding, Jeep Safaris, and mountain bike races.

We're seeing technological changes and new forms of recreation.

- Activities like mountain biking didn't even exist 30 years ago.
- Mountain biking, along with activities such as rafting and OHV use have increased enormously.
- There are 100 times more rafts and whitewater craft than there were 25 years ago.
- Twenty times more OHVs since 1980.

In addition to the maturing popularity of mountain bikes and off-highway vehicles, we are now seeing things like geo-caching, hovercraft, night vision devices, off-road rollerblading, paintball wars, base-jumping and flying machines.

Heritage tourism, adventure travel, and eco-tourism are also growing in popularity.

Increasing conflicts and legal challenges pose yet another challenge.

For some people, filing lawsuits is a form of recreation. At least it seems that way sometimes. Greater public use and more diverse activities are resulting in more conflicts among public land users and more litigation.

We see a greater need for environmental education, interpretation and information.

Our partners have helped us promote environmental stewardship through activities such as National Public Lands Day and through programs such as “Leave No Trace.”

There are other areas where we could do more.

Improving public understanding of our multiple use mission is one. Our staff calculates that 80-90 percent of public contacts with the BLM are related to recreation. Many people view us as a recreation agency. Some who visiting the public lands are surprised to discover that we allow things like cattle grazing, mineral development or energy production in some of these areas.

A broader public understanding of the concept of multiple use can help reduce conflicts among recreationists and those who use the public lands for other purposes that also support the public interest.

We can do a better job of providing information to the public. We’re seeing a lot of progress in this area, particularly with communications tools such as “recreation.gov” and “volunteer.gov.”

But I think we can do more: to help our customers discover what we offer; to help them learn what they can expect to find at different recreation sites: the physical conditions, commercial and social setting, the administrative conditions that are in place; and to help them plan their travel and activities well, so that they get the most from their experience.

Glenn Haas from Colorado State University, who will speak to us later, has wisely observed: “Most of our carrying capacity problems reflect a lack of adequate marketing information that could enable visitors to go elsewhere and choose other less crowded recreation outings.”

Yet another challenge, and possibly one of the most difficult, is the challenge of preserving the unique character of the public lands. Today we talk about *recreation habitats*.

The concept of recreation habitat is that different visitors expect different kinds of recreation habitats, not unlike different wildlife species requiring different habitat.

Recreation habitat varies from primitive to urban.

Changes to recreational habitat may include proliferation of roads, trails, and support facilities. The changes alter the physical character of the land and increase crowding, especially near resort communities and second home developments.

These changes may result in greater administrative controls, including use restrictions, permits and fees, and requirements for specialized gear and equipment.

With more crowding, more conflicts, and more controls, some groups are being displaced by others when their interests are incompatible. Like the girl scouts and the motorcyclists, for example. Many are disappointed that their experiences on the public lands aren't what they used to be.

Overcrowding and increased development can result in a decline in the sense of community, along with increases in crime and vandalism.

If we fail to manage this change, popular public land sites could begin to look like some of the overcrowded, overdeveloped sites managed by other agencies – more restrictive and more closely regulated.

No one wants that to happen. We need to determine how to sustain the distinctive character of public lands recreation – the wide-open spaces, the remaining frontier landscapes, and their relationship to communities.

If we fail to do that, we jeopardize not only the unique character of public lands recreation, but the very health of the public lands, and their ability to sustain other uses and values that are important to us.

Finally, we have to meet all these challenges with limited resources. In our BLM workforce of 10,000 employees, less than 5% are recreation staff: 250 or so are recreation planners; 125 or so are park rangers; and 25 are interpreters.

We have slightly more recreation professionals than we did in 1990, but fewer than in 1980.

However, visitor services and recreation responsibilities are shared by many others, including visitor contact specialists, law enforcement rangers, cultural resource specialists, maintenance crews, wilderness specialists, visitor center staff, and landscape architects.

Funding

The BLM is a multiple use agency by law. That means, in part, that we allocate uses to our land for: grazing, energy production, wildlife, wilderness, recreation, and many other activities and values.

This means we must also allocate our budget and human resources accordingly.

With recreation demands increasing across the West, this creates an enormous challenge for us.

But today I state categorically that President Bush, Secretary Norton and Kathleen Clarke will overcome this challenge. We will not abandon those who want to use our public lands.

Opportunities

We have a growing spirit of volunteerism and service in this country.

President Bush has done a lot to promote this culture of service. He has said:

America needs more than taxpayers, spectators and occasional voters. America needs men and women who respond to the call of duty, who stand up for the weak, who speak up for their beliefs, who sacrifice for a greater good."

The Bureau of Land Management has benefited tremendously from the culture of service and volunteerism spirit of the American people.

Every year, tens of thousands of individual citizens make sacrifices for their public lands -- volunteering their time and energy to help us carry out our work. Nearly half of all volunteer hours are related to recreation.

We also see enormous opportunities in the partnerships we enjoy today, and in the potential that exists for even greater progress in the future. That is especially true in the area of recreation. More than half of our partnerships are related to recreation.

Our Recreation program generates more grants, alternative funding and in-kind support than any other program. Cost Sharing – Our partnerships in recreation and visitor services generate \$8 in outside support for every dollar of appropriated funds we allocate, compared with a 2-1 ratio for most other programs.

Conclusion

We do have an ambitious agenda for our recreation program. We do face some rather daunting challenges. But we also see countless opportunities, and infinite promise.

Personally, I feel very confident about the future of our recreation program. We know what can be accomplished by individuals and organizations who are dedicated to a common purpose, and who work together in partnership.

I want to close by expressing my sincere appreciation to you – and to the citizens you represent – for helping the Bureau of Land Management to carry out the mission the American people have entrusted to us.

My role for the next two days is to listen carefully **to you** – and to the comments, concerns and ideas you bring to this forum. This is a unique opportunity for me to share in a rich discussion with individuals who have a vested interest in the Bureau's Recreation Management program for the public lands. After all, that is the essence of what the Forum is designed to do.

Again, I thank you for being here. With your help, I am confident that we can improve our management of recreational resources and opportunities for now and for future generations. We can ensure that more and more Americans have opportunities to understand, appreciate and enjoy their public lands.

Closing Remarks

BLM Director Kathleen Clarke
Conclusion of the National Recreation Forum
January 30, 2004

This is the end of the forum. But this is only the beginning of the process.

In his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, author Steven Covey says that when we set out to build relationships and partnerships with others, we need to: “Seek first to understand....”

To build a foundation for partnership, we first need to listen carefully to others; invite them to talk about their needs, their values, and their goals. We should seek to understand others so well that we can put ourselves in their shoes, and see the world as they see it.

This “empathetic listening” opens the door to constructive discussion and infinite possibilities for win/win solutions.

I know I speak for all of us in the BLM in saying these past three days have been invaluable to us as we seek to understand **you**, and the values and goals that are important to you, and to those you represent.

As I have visited with many of you individually, I have been impressed with the high level and quality of those represented here. We greatly appreciate your time spent with us and I’m pleased that so many of our BLM State Directors and program leaders were able to meet and interact with each of you.

One of the things I’ve heard is that you want us to understand that you have lots of things in common, but yet appreciate your very important differences. I promise we won’t “homogenize” your views, and we will do our best to maintain the individuality you’ve shared with us.

It's difficult to isolate specific themes out of that wealth of data that we've heard to highlight this morning. But a few broad ideas come to my mind.

- You told us that education and information is important in fostering stewardship for the future.
- You asked us to consider “communities of place and interest” in developing and sustaining partnerships.
- You shared with us the importance of technology in recreation and told us to take better advantage of the technology available to us now and in the future.
- Finally, you urged us to recognize that the values of settings and experiences are legacies for us to pass on to future generations.

So, what happens next? We will immediately begin to assimilate all the information we have gathered here, but that will take some time.

First and foremost, I can promise you that recreation will receive more high-level attention among BLM's multiple use mandates, and I have placed it on the agenda for our BLM Executive Leadership Team meeting in March.

We will also move forward to broaden the base of public information and input, providing opportunities for others to share their views about the future of public lands recreation.

We believe the comments we have heard at this forum, and the issues that have been raised, will prompt further discussions among recreation interests, and generate additional views and suggestions that will be very helpful to us.

We hope that, as informal ambassadors to this gathering, you have also gained a broader understanding of the interests of others.

We hope you depart with an appreciation for all that we have in common, and all that we can accomplish together.

Let me leave you with a thought that has resonated throughout this forum. Recreation is important to the health of the American people, our communities, our economies, and our very quality of life in this country.

I encourage all of you to build on the relationships that have been fostered here to help us work toward improving the future of recreation opportunities on the public lands.

Thank you all for coming.